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COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
Substantive session
Agenda item 9

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

Rapporteur: Mr. Mame Balla SY (Senegal)

II. CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION

Addendum

D. Implementation of the rules and regulations on control and limitation of documentation: compliance with the six-week rule for issuance of pre-session documentation

Introduction and overview

1. In paragraph 24 of its resolution 46/190 of 20 December 1991, the General Assembly urged the Secretary-General:

> "to take necessary measures to ensure that pre-session documents for meetings are distributed no less than six weeks before the meetings, unless there is a specific decision to the contrary, simultaneously in all official languages of the organs of the United Nations, and to circulate eight weeks before the opening of a session of an intergovernmental body, with the annotated agenda of the session, a report on the exact state of preparation at that time of all the documents in all languages required for the session".

2. In paragraph 25 of the same resolution, the General Assembly requested:

> "the Secretary-General and the executive heads of United Nations programmes and funds and the secretariats of United Nations organs to ensure that each official document carries on its front page and in an appropriate manner the dates concerning the following stages of the

documentation process: issuance by the substantive Department; completion of the translation into the specific language; printing; issuance;".

3. At its organizational meeting, held on 17 March 1992, the Committee on Conferences requested the Secretariat to provide a written report on Secretariat compliance with the six-week rule for issuance of pre-session documentation to its 1992 substantive session. It was also decided that the Secretariat would report on the implementation of paragraph 25 of General Assembly resolution 46/190, under this agenda item.

4. At its 336th meeting, on 24 August 1992, the Committee considered the matter on the basis of a conference room paper and an oral report from the Secretariat on its compliance with paragraph 25 of General Assembly resolution 46/190.

Discussion

5. It was observed that there seemed to be a general lack of compliance with the six-week rule, and that the report provided by the Secretariat again presented an overview of the current situation rather than proposals for solutions. Specific reference was made to the conference room paper submitted under agenda item 2 (b) on the utilization of conference-servicing resources, which presented information on the calculation of an availability index on pre-session documentation, but failed to provide any specific data on the availability of pre-session documentation for intergovernmental/expert bodies. The Committee had anticipated receiving more in-depth analysis in order to evaluate, inter alia, the effect that the timely issuance of quality documentation had on the utilization factor, and the prevailing situation with regard to availability as compared to previous years.

6. The relevant provisions of General Assembly resolutions on the control and limitation of documentation specified that pre-session documentation should be submitted 10 weeks, and issued 6 weeks, prior to the opening date of a session. Further, a detailed report on the exact status of pre-session documentation should be issued eight weeks prior to the opening date. That, in turn, established that the Office of Conference Services had four weeks to edit, translate, type, print and issue pre-session documentation. If documentation was submitted late, and if the sessional dates were not adjusted, late-submission reduced the time available to the Office of Conference Services, thereby placing an additional burden on its documentation capacity. It was therefore necessary fully to examine and control all organizational aspects of Secretariat compliance related to the documentation process, including within author departments.

7. It was also noted that the report on the status of documentation would greatly assist intergovernmental/expert bodies in planning their work, taking account of the timely availability of documentation, and adjusting sessional dates if necessary.

8. In response to questions raised, the Secretariat indicated that the restructuring process and the assignment of staff to field missions had affected all areas involved in processing documentation, from drafting through issuance. Historically, the Secretariat had strived for better discipline in drafting and submitting documentation, and had and continued to maximize the use of technological innovations, in order to eliminate bottlenecks in the processing stages. However, the situation was currently exacerbated by time-constraints caused by late-submission and aggravated by the increased quantity of Security Council-related documentation, which had to be processed on an urgent basis. Without spectacular changes in technology available, such as in the development of usable machine translation, or voice recognition technology that would reduce time spent in transcription, keyboarding and typing, it was unlikely that technology would significantly assist the Secretariat specifically in the area of translation.

9. The information printed on each document on the various dates of the documentation process was useful, but confusing in presentation. It would greatly assist delegations if an explanatory document could be issued and widely distributed.

Conclusions and recommendations

10. The Committee decided to repeat and strongly confirm its insistence on full compliance with paragraph 24 of resolution 46/190 (see para. 1 above).

11. The Committee emphasized that the resolution established three separate deadlines relating to the issuance of pre-session documentation. First, author departments should submit pre-session documentation for processing to the Office of Conference Services 10 weeks prior to the start of a session. Secondly, a report on the status of preparation of pre-session documentation should be issued eight weeks prior to the scheduled start of a session. Thirdly, all pre-session documentation should be issued six weeks prior to the scheduled opening date.

12. The Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it urge subsidiary organs to review their agendas with a view to assessing if they could assist in compliance with the six-week rule, via such things as merging/combining agenda items, and limiting requests for pre-session documentation wherever possible.

13. The Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it issue an appeal to intergovernmental bodies to make active use of the report on the state of preparation of pre-session documentation when reviewing the organizational arrangements for substantive sessions.

14. The Committee requested the Secretariat to intensify its efforts in interdepartmental consultation and cooperation in order to improve the timely availability of quality documentation, and to report on the steps taken in that regard to the Committee when it next considered the agenda item on compliance with the six-week rule.

15. The Committee regretted that the Secretariat had not provided the information requested on the availability index for pre-session documentation, and requested the Secretariat to ensure that future reports on meeting and documentation statistics fully incorporate quantitative information on the availability of pre-session documentation.

16. The Committee requested the Secretariat to reissue the document that provided explanations of the indicator dates included on all documents, pursuant to paragraph 25 of General Assembly resolution 46/190. The Committee requested the Secretariat to include that information in future issues of the "Information for Delegations" handbooks.